

Dear friends and colleagues,

I thought you would be interested in a recent op-ed published yesterday by AlterNet from Venezuela's climate negotiator, Claudia Salerno. You can find it at the following link as well as in text form below:

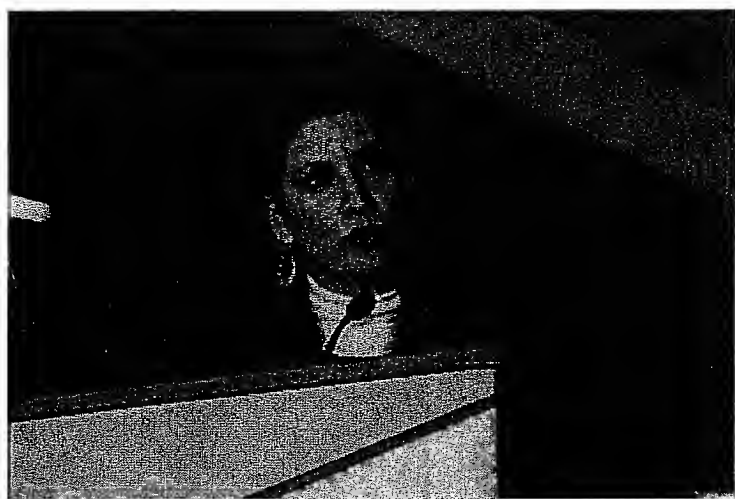
[http://www.alternet.org/environment/148733/we\\_must\\_stop\\_climate\\_change\\_and\\_we\\_can\\_do\\_it\\_in\\_cancun](http://www.alternet.org/environment/148733/we_must_stop_climate_change_and_we_can_do_it_in_cancun)

Best, Olivia

## Claudia Salerno, Venezuela's Presidential Envoy for Climate Change **We Must Stop Climate Change and We Can Do it in Cancun**

**Published:** 11/03/2010

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By Claudia Salerno

Article published by AlterNet on November 3, 2010. If anyone wants to reprint it, please visit original [Web site](#).

*Venezuela's lead negotiator on climate change writes that protecting the earth's climate is quite achievable if there is the political will to do so.*

As Venezuela's lead negotiator on climate change, I recently participated in a preparatory round of negotiations in China leading up to the global summit in December in Cancun, Mexico. This summit will take up where the 2009 Copenhagen Summit on Climate Change left off.

Much has been said in the media about the meeting, and one thing is certainly true – there is plenty of frustration and uncertainty about the possibility of achieving an agreement on climate change by year's end. But this does not mean it is impossible.

In fact, it is quite achievable if there is the political will to do so. Developed countries need only to commit to fulfilling their existing first period reduction obligations established by the Kyoto Protocol and pledge to substantially reduce and reabsorb their domestic greenhouse gas emissions in accordance to a second commitment period to be established in Cancun.

According to almost all scientific studies, we know that entire nation states like Tuvalu are destined to literally sink into the sea as a result of global warming. In South America, mountain tops where snow used to fall and glaciers form have gone barren. Even U.S. governmental agencies report that this past decade is the warmest one ever experienced by mankind.

We are approaching a critical time in human history, one where we can either move forward to reverse the effects of climate change or continue down a path that will soon become irreversible and destroy our planet. If global warming increases by more than two degrees Celsius in coming years, as will surely happen if no reasonable and fair agreement is reached quickly, there is a 50 percent chance that the damage caused will be irreversible.

Unlike what many suggest, China is not the problem. China, along with India and others, have made considerable commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and are already working to realize them. Other developing countries have done the same, although we only generate a virtual drop in the bucket of global carbon emissions. The key player missing here is the U.S.

I had the great opportunity this week to spend time with U.S.-based environmentalists, climate experts and policy makers while speaking at the Green Festival in Washington, D.C. and participating in a panel discussion at Boston College. It seems clear to me that the American people do not want a repeat of the 2009 Copenhagen Summit, where a proposal made by a small number of powerful countries would have allowed for a disastrous 3-4 degree rise in temperature over the next 30 years. (Fortunately, Venezuela and some other countries opposed this proposal).

The American people want progress and they want action – and they want it this year. “How many climate catastrophes are acceptable before we act?” I asked during my talk. One responded, “Hurricane Katrina was already too much. We are still suffering from that.”

In the world of global negotiations, I can tell you, one more round of talks without real commitments will also be one beyond what our planet can afford. While it is absurd for us to believe that all the nations of the world will agree on everything, we must act on what we already agreed on in 1992 at the Framework Convention: developed countries’ greenhouse gas emissions must be significantly reduced. As President Obama said last year in Copenhagen, “It’s better for us to choose action over inaction.”

I truly hope the U.S. will act upon this sentiment in Cancun and join the rest of the world in fully committing to aggressive action to stop climate change. For the sake of humanity and our planet, nothing less will do.

*Claudia Salerno is Venezuela's Presidential Envoy for Climate Change.*

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This material is distributed by Olivia Goumbri, on behalf of the Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.

Dear friends and colleagues,

I thought you would be interested in this article published in the New York Times today featuring Venezuela's Climate Negotiator, Claudia Salerno:

<http://www.nytimes.com/cwire/2010/11/10/10climatewire-venezuelan-climate-envoy-recalls-bloody-palm-21433.html?scp=5&sq=lisa%20friedman&st=cse>

Best, Olivia

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**New York Times/ Climate Wire**

**Venezuelan Climate Envoy Recalls 'Bloody Palm' Incident, Has High Hopes for Cancun**

**By LISA FRIEDMAN of [ClimateWire](http://www.nytimes.com/cwire)**

November 10, 2010

<http://www.nytimes.com/cwire/2010/11/10/10climatewire-venezuelan-climate-envoy-recalls-bloody-palm-21433.html?scp=5&sq=lisa%20friedman&st=cse>

<http://www.eenews.net/cw/>

For the bleary-eyed diplomats, activists and journalists watching the final, bitter dawn of last year's climate change conference, the blood dripping from Claudia Salerno's palm was the most surreal moment of them all.

"Do you think a sovereign country has to actually cut its hand and draw blood?" the lead Venezuelan negotiator angrily demanded of the Danish hosts and U.N. officials after repeated calls for a point of order were ignored. Holding up her palm that morning, Salerno declared, "This hand, which is bleeding now, wants to speak, and it has the same right of any of those which you call a representative group of leaders."

Nearly a year later, Salerno said she is still stunned by her own outburst in Copenhagen -- as well as by the raucous events of that evening, which, she said, forced her into a decidedly undiplomatic position. As negotiators prepare for the next major U.N. climate conference in Cancun , Mexico , at the end of this month, Salerno said she feels significant trust between nations has been restored.

"I have to admit, I am one of the few that are optimistic about the process," Salerno told *ClimateWire* in a recent telephone interview after visiting Washington, D.C., to promote global action on climate change.

"Mexico has done a fantastic job. They've been doing a lot to put parties together to help us talk to each other and understand our positions. Now we are going to Cancun feeling comfortable with the presidency and trusting them, which is the major thing, because we didn't have this feeling in November of last year," she said.

### **A leader who helped block the Copenhagen Accord**

Venezuela this year leads the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas , or ALBA, a group of Latin American nations that last year successfully blocked the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) from adopting the Copenhagen Accord.

Salerno said her opposition to the political agreement forged by President Obama and the leaders of China , India , Brazil and South Africa has not changed. And she pointed out that while more than 100 countries have "associated" themselves with the agreement, that description means different things to different countries and often comes with a number of caveats.

Still, Salerno also emphasized that she is not opposed to the substance of the agreement as much as to the method that produced it. In addition to the four emerging economies and the United States , the all-night closed-door talks that preceded the Copenhagen Accord included leaders from all parts of the world, but they were not selected within the U.N. system.

"It just was the fact that 24 countries could talk, that they could impose on the rest of the world what they had negotiated behind closed doors," she said. "Now we have options. Now we can discuss the ideas behind it in an open and democratic way."

In fact, she said, Venezuela was the country that in the end allowed the United Nations to "take note of" the accord, a compromise that allowed the agreement some measure of formal recognition and the breath of life to see it forward.

"That was a huge flexibility for my country, because I recognized that this was a huge political issue," Salerno said. "I showed them that my issue was not the content. I was not against the fact that some countries gathered together to solve an issue, but that that was not the way to proceed at the United Nations."

Exactly what will become of the Copenhagen Accord is unclear. The document records the pledges of all major emitters to either cut carbon or carbon intensity, and to openly monitor and report those efforts. In return, industrialized countries vowed to mobilize about \$100 billion annually by 2020 for vulnerable countries.

### **Nobody has any expectations' of the U.S.**

The United States and developed countries hope to formalize the elements of that agreement into a series of decisions. They are pushing for what they call a "balanced package" -- that is, no money without a promise of targets and transparency. Developing countries, meanwhile, are pressing to focus first on the money and work on other issues down the road. Meanwhile, few know what will be the fate of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, the first commitment period of which expires in 2012.

There have been quiet signs from Europe that the European Union might be willing to agree to a second commitment period in Cancun while working on a broader, new agreement. Salerno called that "a very amazing sign" but acknowledged there was little consensus.

The absence of climate change legislation in the United States, she predicted, won't have much of an impact on the talks. Cap-and-trade legislation died in the Senate earlier this year, and Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) recently declared future prospects "dead for the foreseeable future."

"That lowered the expectations of the U.S., but nobody has any expectations of them," Salerno said. "The ones that were always saying, 'The U.S. will not do anything,' now are just saying, 'I told you so.'"

The Obama administration has maintained it is not backing down from its Copenhagen pledge of about 17 percent emission reductions below 2005 levels by 2020 and more than 80 percent by midcentury. It is eyeing U.S. EPA regulation and moving legislative "chunks" of energy policy through Congress next year.

Venezuela's submission to the UNFCCC regarding the accord was a 10-page Hugo Chavez-inspired attack on capitalism -- under which, according to the entry, "Mother Earth is just the source of raw materials and human beings are just a means of production and consumers."

The fifth-largest oil producing country in the world insists upon working to stabilize temperatures to a 1- to 1.5-degree rise over preindustrial levels -- though without making any proposal that cuts demand for oil. Instead, the submission outlines dire predictions about what could happen to biodiversity and country stability if temperatures rise too high, and denounces the Copenhagen agreement as illegitimate.

Salerno also indicated that the other ALBA countries that blocked the Copenhagen Accord -- Nicaragua, Bolivia and Cuba, which joined with Sudan in opposition -- are ready to again stand between the United Nations and any other agreement they deem unacceptable.

**I completely forgot I was a diplomat'**

"We are very strong countries, and we are ready to blame whoever needs to be blamed to say we need a good agreement, not any agreement," Salerno said. "We will not sell our emissions for any money." But she also said she is loath to see another conference like the one she experienced in Copenhagen .

That final night, she recalled, after watching President Obama announce the Copenhagen Accord on closed-circuit television at about 11 p.m., the other negotiators -- surprised by the event -- waited about four more hours for some direction. The Danish Prime Minister finally arrived at about 3 a .m. and presented the accord and told the gathered diplomats he would reconvene the plenary in an hour so they could rubber-stamp the agreement. Then he moved to adjourn.

Salerno recalled that she raised her country flag and was ignored. Other countries raised their flags. The prime minister appeared oblivious to the U.N. parliamentary procedures, which say a meeting can't be suspended until a point of order is heard. With the microphone still open, the Danish leader told a U.N. official he would not be recognizing the waiting countries. That's when all hell broke loose.

"The mic was open, and everybody listened to it," Salerno said. "I felt so offended by this guy doing that. I took the nameplate of Venezuela -- you know, the plastic nameplate in front -- and I took it and started banging at the table, and some other countries started joining me, as well."

"I was banging and banging and banging, and I was wearing a big ring, and actually, the ring got inside my finger. I was so mad that I didn't even feel it," she said. Finally, the prime minister returned and gave the floor to Venezuela . Salerno said a colleague pointed out to her the blood running down her hand.

"At that moment, I was like, 'What is happening here? I am in a U.N. conference. This is the United Nations; [Secretary-General] Ban Ki-moon is sitting there, and I have to bang on a table to speak?' I was so offended at the whole situation, but mostly that I had to bang on the table. We're diplomats here, and at that moment, I completely forgot I was a diplomat."

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Dear friends and colleagues,

I thought you would be interested in these updates. Please find them below and here: <http://venezuela-us.org/2011/01/19/president-chavez-announced-decision-to-cut-short-enabling-law-during-speech-to-national-assembly/>

Best wishes, Olivia



- Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in the U.S. -

## **President Chávez Announced Decision to Cut Short Enabling Law During Speech to National Assembly**

- *Sends a Message of Friendship to the U.S.*
- *Reaches Out to Opposition*
- *Addressed Pressing Issues*

During his annual state of the nation speech to Venezuela's National Assembly last Saturday, President Hugo Chávez announced that he will cut short the 18-month period of the Enabling Law, which had been granted to him by the National Assembly last December.

**The Enabling Law** <sup>[1]</sup>, as it is known in Venezuela, was granted so President Chavez could deal more quickly and efficiently with the emergencies caused by the historic heavy rains throughout the country that left over 130,000 Venezuelans without homes. But despite the need and constitutionality of the law, President Chavez stated in his speech to the National Assembly that he will do away with it on May 2011 – more than a year ahead of its expiration date.

On Tuesday Vice President Elías Jaua stated in a TV Interview that with this decision the president sought to dissipate political doubts about the objectives of the Enabling Law.

**Bloomberg** <sup>[2]</sup> quoted Chávez saying, "I'll return the Enabling Law. I'll give it back. I don't have any problem. I'll work harder and faster." Chávez added: "In five months, we can carry out all the laws that we need to confront the emergency."

**Sends a Message of Friendship to the U.S.**

Chávez also expressed his regret over the absence of some foreign ambassadors, including the U.S. diplomatic envoy. "We would like to have a U.S. ambassador here, and from all over the world," he said.

Venezuela's president said that when he met the U.S. Secretary of State in Brazil on January 1<sup>st</sup> of this year, she asked, "Would you allow me to directly address the issue of our ambassador?" Chávez said he replied in the affirmative.

**Reuters** <sup>[3]</sup> reported the statement noting that President Chávez sent a message of friendship to President Barack Obama, recounting to the Assembly his recent handshake and chat with Secretary Clinton. According to the News Agency, Chávez said, "I said to her, 'Tell Obama that this hand I am giving you now, I offer to him too.'"

### **Reaches Out to Opposition**

President Chávez also used his speech to reach out to new opposition members in the National Assembly, including shaking hands with opposition leader Maria Corina Machado. During the speech, Chávez said to opposition members, "I'm happy to see you here." **CNN** <sup>[4]</sup> reported that he also urged the opposition to "sow seeds of harmony and dialogue."

After the 2010 parliamentary elections, the Venezuelan political opposition has around 40 percent of the seats in the National Assembly. During the period of 2006-2010 they had little representation in the legislative due to their decision to boycott the 2005 legislative elections despite calls from the Organization of American State and the Carter Center.

### **Addressed Pressing Issues**

President Chávez also addressed the economy, acknowledging the obstacles in the recovery of the country after the global financial crisis, such as the fall of oil prices, the severe drought that caused electricity shortages and serious cases of financial fraud. These crises were properly handled by the government, he stated.

According to the news website **Venezuelanalysis** <sup>[5]</sup>, the president remembered that the bank fraud "obliged" the state to intervene in four private banks and led to the creation by the state of the Bicentenary bank. Chávez also remembered that the priority of the government has been paying back funds lost by Venezuelan account holders. As an example, he said that 98% of the account holders of Banco Federal had been already paid. Banco Federal was owned by the Venezuelan citizen Nelson Mezerhane, who fled from the country after the fraud.

The president stated that the Venezuelan government expects that the economy will grow two percent in 2011. He also noted that the country's external debt was reduced, and now stands at 20 percent of GDP, a substantial drop from the 80 percent it reached in 1988.

He also spoke of two pressing issues for all Venezuelans – crime and housing. Regarding crime, the president explained the efforts that are being made to address this complex problem. He highlighted that some of these efforts are already showing results. For example, the National Bolivarian Police have managed a reduction of 44 percent of murders in the districts where it is starting to work. "The Bolivarian National Police is a new, serious and human policing model", he added.

On the issue of housing, he said "I accept that we've been held back by the historical problem of housing in Venezuela, so we're going to take measures, because housing isn't merchandise but rather a right of all Venezuelans," said Chávez. "We're far from the goal but we're heading towards it... in Fuerte Tiuna we're going to create a big city with at least 40,000 apartments, and in the centre of Caracas we're constructing another 20,000 apartments."

Chávez also announced a food plan to increase national production. He cited successes in increasing Internet access for all Venezuelans – from three percent before he was elected to 33 percent of the population in 2010.

**Photo by: Venezuelan News Agency (AVN)**

**Press Office –Venezuelan Embassy to the U.S. /January 19, 2011**



URL to article: <http://venezuela-us.org/2011/01/19/president-chavez-announced-decision-to-cut-short-enabling-law-during-speech-to-national-assembly/>

URLs in this post:

- [1] The Enabling Law: [http://venezuela-us.org/live/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/01-05-2011-FS-Enabling-Law-ver-2 .pdf](http://venezuela-us.org/live/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/01-05-2011-FS-Enabling-Law-ver-2.pdf)
- [2] Bloomberg: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-01-15/chavez-says-he-may-reduce-duration-of-decree-powers-to-four-to-five-months.html>
- [3] Reuters: <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE70E1V320110115>
- [4] CNN: [http://articles.cnn.com/2011-01-15/world/venezuela.chavez\\_1\\_decree-powers-venezuela-s-chavez-venezuelan-president-hugo-chavez?\\_s=PM:WORLD](http://articles.cnn.com/2011-01-15/world/venezuela.chavez_1_decree-powers-venezuela-s-chavez-venezuelan-president-hugo-chavez?_s=PM:WORLD)
- [5] Venezuelanalysis: <http://venezuelanalysis.com/print/5940>

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## Presidente Chávez anuncia decisión de recortar Ley Habilitante durante rendición de cuentas a Asamblea Nacional

- *Envía mensaje de amistad a Estados Unidos*
- *Tiende la mano a la oposición*
- *Abordó temas urgentes*

Durante la presentación de la Memoria y Cuenta a la Asamblea Nacional venezolana este sábado, el presidente Hugo Chávez anunció que reducirá los 18 meses de la Ley Habilitante que le fue otorgada en diciembre por la anterior legislatura.

La **Ley Habilitante** <sup>[1]</sup>, como es conocida en Venezuela, le fue otorgada al Presidente a finales de diciembre de 2010, para que pudiera manejar con rapidez y eficiencia las emergencias causadas por las históricas fuertes lluvias que afectaron el país y dejaron más de 130.000 venezolanos sin hogares. A pesar de la necesidad y la constitucionalidad de la Ley, el presidente Chávez afirmó en su discurso a la Asamblea Nacional que el devolverá los poderes en Mayo de 2011 - más de un año antes de su fecha de expiración.

El martes el vicepresidente Elías Jaua afirmó en una entrevista de televisión que con esta decisión el Presidente buscaba disipar las dudas de naturaleza política sobre los objetivos de la Ley Habilitante.

La agencia de noticias **Bloomberg** <sup>[2]</sup> citó en inglés a Chávez diciendo, "os devuelvo la Ley Habilitante, se las devuelvo, no tengo ningún problema, voy a trabajar más duro y más rápido." Chávez añadió "el primero de Mayo pudiéramos nosotros haber terminado, acelerando las leyes que estamos haciendo para confrontar la emergencia".

### Envía mensaje de amistad a Estados Unidos

Chávez también lamentó la ausencia de algunos embajadores, incluyendo el representante diplomático de Estados Unidos. "Nosotros quisiéramos tener aquí a un embajador de Estados Unidos, así como de todos los países del mundo", dijo.

El presidente venezolano señaló que cuando él se reunió con la Secretaria de Estado de Estados Unidos en Brasil, el 1 de enero de este año, ella le preguntó, "¿Usted me permite que yo maneje directamente con usted el tema del embajador nuestro?". Chávez dijo que él respondió afirmativamente.

**Reuters** <sup>[3]</sup> reportó sobre la declaración subrayando que el presidente Chávez envió un mensaje de amistad al presidente Barack Obama, contándole a la Asamblea Nacional sobre su reciente apretón de manos y conversación con la Secretaria Clinton. De acuerdo a la Agencia de Noticias, Chávez dijo, "dígame a Obama que aquí esta mano que le doy a usted ahora mismo, se la repito allá".

### **Tiende la mano a la oposición**

El presidente Chávez también utilizó su discurso para tender la mano a la oposición en la Asamblea Nacional, lo que incluyó un apretón de manos con la líder opositora María Corina Machado. Durante su alocución, Chávez dijo a miembros de la oposición "me da gusto verlos aquí". **CNN** <sup>[4]</sup> dijo que también exhortó a la oposición a que "siembren la semilla del diálogo".

Después de las elecciones parlamentarias, la oposición política venezolana tiene cerca de 40% de los escaños en la Asamblea Nacional. Durante el período 2006-2010 casi no tuvieron representación en el cuerpo legislativo debido a su decisión de sabotear las elecciones parlamentarias de 2005, a pesar de los llamados de la Organización de Estados Americanos (OEA) y el Centro Carter.

### **Abordó temas urgentes**

El presidente Chávez también abordó el tema de la economía, reconociendo los obstáculos para la recuperación de la economía del país luego de la crisis financiera mundial, tal como la caída de los precios del petróleo, la severa sequía que causó racionamientos eléctricos y los serios casos de fraude financiero. Estas crisis fueron manejadas de manera apropiada por el Gobierno, aseguró.

De acuerdo al sitio de noticias **Venezuelanalysis** <sup>[5]</sup>, el Presidente recordó que el fraude bancario "obligó" al Estado a intervenir cuatro bancos privados y llevó a la creación del estatal Banco Bicentenario. Chávez también recordó que la prioridad del gobierno ha sido devolver los fondos que perdieron los ahorristas venezolanos. Como ejemplo, dijo que ya se han pagado a 98% de los ahorristas del Banco Federal. Esta institución financiera era propiedad del ciudadano venezolano Nelson Mezerhane, quien huyó del país luego del fraude.

El Presidente declaró que el Gobierno venezolano espera un crecimiento de la economía de 2% en 2011. Asimismo, destacó que se redujo la deuda externa del país, por lo que ahora se ubica en 20% del PIB, una caída substancial considerando el 80% alcanzado en 1988.

El líder venezolano también habló de dos temas urgentes para todos los venezolanos y venezolanas: la criminalidad y la vivienda. Con relación al crimen, el Presidente explicó los esfuerzos que se están realizando para atender este problema complejo. Destacó que algunos de estos esfuerzos ya están mostrando resultados. Por ejemplo, la Policía Nacional Bolivariana ha logrado una reducción de 44% de los asesinatos en los distritos donde está empezando a trabajar. "La Policía Nacional Bolivariana es un modelo policial nuevo, serio y humano", agregó.

Sobre el tema de la vivienda, dijo "lo acepto, a estas alturas nosotros nos hemos quedado muy, muy cortos, en relación con la gran demanda; y más que demanda, el gran problema histórico de la vivienda en Venezuela. Ahora, este es uno de los factores que nos ha obligado a tomar otras medidas (...) La vivienda ya no es una mercancía sino un derecho del pueblo".

"Estamos muy lejos de la meta... Pero creo que hemos tomado el pulso de la situación para solucionar ese problema, ese drama, en los próximos años... En Fuerte Tiuna vamos a hacer una gran ciudad, por lo menos de 40 mil apartamentos; aquí en el casco urbano de Caracas, con terrenos que hemos estado recuperando, ya hemos comenzado a construir más de 20 mil viviendas," explicó.

Chávez también anunció un plan alimentario para incrementar la producción nacional. Además citó el éxito del aumento del acceso de Internet para todos los venezolanos, de 3% antes de su elección a 33% de la población en 2010.

**Prensa - Embajada venezolana en EE UU / 19 de enero de 2010**

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This material is distributed by Olivia Gombri, on behalf of the Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.

Dear friends,

This upcoming Wed, Feb. 2 marks the 12 year anniversary of the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela. I hope you will be able to attend this event, being sponsored by various community groups in Washington DC, to honor the achievements of the Venezuelan people and democracy in Venezuela.

Please pass on to your friends and hope to see you there! See the flyer attached and below.

Best, Olivia

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We invite you to an historic celebration in honor of

**12 YEARS OF PEOPLES DEMOCRACY IN VENEZUELA:**  
**A Tribute to the Bolivarian Revolution,**  
**A Growing Hope for Latin America and the World!**

**Festival Center**  
**1640 Columbia Rd., NW**  
**Washington, DC 20009**



**Wednesday, Feb. 2, 2011, 6:30pm-8:30pm**

**Honored Speaker: Roy Chaderton, Venezuelan Ambassador to the OAS**  
**Moderated by: Reverend Graylan Hagler- Plymouth Congregational United**  
**Church of Christ, Sonia Umanzor- Committee of the FMLN-DC**

Feb. 2 marks the 12 year anniversary of the inauguration of President Chavez and the beginning of the Bolivarian Revolution. Some of Venezuela's most impressive achievements that we want to celebrate include: A reduction in poverty by 44% between 1998 and 2008 according to the United Nations Development Programme and the OAS, a fall in unemployment from 16.8% in 2003 to 7% in 2010, an increase by 10 places on the Human Development Index of the United Nations from 1998 to 2008, and the near obliteration of illiteracy.

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Dear friends and colleagues,

Please see our main story today (also below) about yesterday's event in Washington DC to honor the 12 year anniversary of the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela. A picture slide show follows at the end of the article: <http://venezuela-us.org/>

Regards, Olivia

## **In the 12th Anniversary of the Venezuelan Democratic Revolution U.S. Organizations Celebrate Achievements by Venezuelan Government**

**Published:** 02/02/2011



On Wednesday, February 2 in Washington, D.C. the twelfth anniversary of Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution was celebrated by a diverse group of progressive organizations. The groups, which included those representing Afro-descendents, immigrants and workers and others opposed to war and interventionism, organized an event to express their support for the government of President Hugo Chávez. Gathered in the Festival Center in Washington, D.C.'s Adams Morgan neighborhood, more than 200 representatives of the organizations highlighted the achievements made by the Venezuelan government over the last 12 years.

"The Bolivarian Revolution is based on the dignity of the working people, leading a global movement that isn't only for Venezuela, but serves as a model for the world and shows that the people can progress," stressed Reverend Graylan Hagler, a moderator of the event, minister at a Protestant church and a well-known social justice activist.

The event was also attended by friends of the Venezuelan process of changes that work in think tanks, universities and non-governmental organizations.

Gustavo Torres, director of CASA de Maryland, an organization serving Latino immigrants in the U.S., pointed out that the two principal achievements of the Bolivarian Revolution over the last 12 years have been "the development of a profoundly democratic and participatory process and an

extraordinary investment in the poor." Torres added, "This has changed the dynamic in Latin America; there is now evidence that profound changes can come through democratic means."

Andrew Castro, National Coordinator for the ANSWER Coalition, explained how there exist many misconceptions in the U.S. regarding who President Chávez is and what's occurring in Venezuela. "But with the financial crisis and recession in the U.S., with people losing their homes and jobs, many Americans are realizing that Venezuela is trying to construct an alternative model to capitalism."

"There have been many achievements in Venezuela since 1999. The new Constitution that defends the rights of women and indigenous people, the eradication of illiteracy, the significant decrease in poverty and inequality, increases in access to the Internet, and investment of state resources in the bettering of the people," he explained.

Venezuelan legislator Francisco Torrealba, invited as guest of honor to the event, expressed the gratitude of the Venezuelan people for the demonstrations of solidarity by the US people. "In Venezuela we will continue the process of political and social transformation that's necessary for the achievement of social justice and to pay down the historic debt owed by prior governments to the neediest of our people. This will always happen in peace, democracy and within the bounds of the Constitution," he stressed.

Ambassador Bernardo Alvarez sent a video greeting to the groups from Caracas in which he stressed the achievements of the democratic revolution taking place in Venezuela. "We have many reasons to be optimistic; that optimism is based on the participation of the Venezuelan people and also the support that we receive from many people from around the world, including all of you," he said.

Diplomats and other workers of the Venezuelan embassy in the U.S. also assisted as guests of the event. Diplomats from other countries in the region also joined the event to celebrate the successes of the Bolivarian Revolution.

President Hugo Chávez was elected overwhelmingly in 1998 and took office on February 2, 1999.

**Original link to article with slide show:**

**<http://venezuela-us.org/2011/02/02/u-s-organizations-celebrate-achievements-by-venezuelan-government/>**

**Photos: Néstor Sánchez Cordero**

**Press Office –Venezuelan Embassy to the U.S./ February 2, 2011**

COMMON THREADS

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Dear friends and colleagues,

This week, Amenothep Zambrano, the executive secretary for the coordination of ALBA (The Bolivarian Alliance of the Peoples of Our America), visited the United States. You can find information about his visit below. For more detailed information on ALBA please visit their website (in spanish) here: <http://alba-tcp.org/> or our fact sheet (in english) here: <http://venezuela-us.org/live/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/02-08-2011-ALBA-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

View photos of his visit here: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/embavenezdc/>

Best, Olivia

## ALBA's Executive Secretary:

### ALBA Countries Closest to Reaching Millennium Development Goals

**Published:** 02/15/2011

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Amenothep Zambrano, the executive secretary of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America, highlighted the social and development gains that the Latin American and Caribbean bloc has made



during a number of meetings in Washington, D.C. from February 12-15, 2011.

Zambrano's visit to the U.S. capital came after his participation in the annual meeting of the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) last week in New York.

"When we see the social gains made by ALBA countries and at the same time hear testimony at the ECOSOC meeting, that the majority of the world's countries won't achieve the Millennium Development Goals, it becomes clear that ALBA is doing what's right – economic policies simply can't work against social policies," said Zambrano during a meeting with progressive groups in Washington, D.C. on Sunday.

According to Zambrano, in just five years 11 million people have escaped poverty in ALBA countries, while literacy rates increased from 84% to 96% (five of the eight countries in the bloc have been recognized by the UN as being free of illiteracy), infant mortality rates have dropped 32% and over 2.2 million people with disabilities have been attended to just in 2010. Additionally, Zambrano noted, there are now close to 1,000 students from ALBA countries in the Latin American School of Medicine, another ALBA initiative.

"ALBA's fight is for a second true independence for Latin America and the Caribbean; to free ourselves from poverty and illiteracy and achieve development for our people," stressed Zambrano to the progressive groups while referring to the bicentennial celebration of independence from the Spanish kingdom that Venezuela and other Latin American countries have been celebrating since 2010.

Zambrano worked his way through a busy agenda during his short stay in Washington, D.C. The agenda included various gatherings with progressive social groups, meetings in the U.S. Congress and events at think tanks and non-profit organizations.

On Monday, ALBA's executive secretary participated in a forum for students and professors at Howard University. The forum was organized, among others, by the noted Afro-descendent human rights organization TransAfrica Forum and Cimarrones, a social movement composed of Latino and Afro-descendent members that fights for equality in Latin America and the Caribbean.

During the forum, Zambrano highlighted the work that ALBA has done in Haiti. "After the January 2010 earthquake, ALBA developed the only camps that follow UN guidelines, provided thousands of people with free surgeries, distributed medicines, and created a humanitarian fund," he explained. "But don't think that ALBA arrived in Haiti only after the tragedy. No, ALBA has been working with its Haitian brothers and sisters since it was founded."

One of the recurring questions faced by Zambrano was if there existed any interest in expanding ALBA beyond its current members. He explained that ALBA is a flexible integration mechanism that does not require that countries interested in participating in its initiatives join the bloc. "Currently countries like Uruguay, Paraguay, Haiti, Grenada, Syria, and Russia are friends of the alliance," he pointed out.

Zambrano also emphasized the importance of ALBA's Social Movement Council and the role played by social movements, especially indigenous and Afro-Latino groups, in the mechanism of integration.



ALBA was created in 2004 and is currently made up of eight countries representing 70 million people: Antigua and Barbuda, Bolivia, Cuba, Dominica, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Venezuela. Honduras was a member of the bloc until the coup government of Roberto Micheletti pulled out in December 2009.

In 2009, ALBA's member-states chose to include the phrase "People's Trade Agreement" in the name of the organization (it is now formally known as ALBA-TCP) as a means to emphasize the importance of developing commerce under the principles of solidarity, complementarity, and cooperation for the direct benefit of the people.

Read more about **ALBA in our fact sheet**.

**Photo: Néstor Sánchez Cordero**

**Press Office – Venezuelan Embassy to the U.S. / February 15, 2011**

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Dear friends and colleagues,  
Please find our most recent statement below.  
Best, Olivia



**Embassy of the Bolivarian  
Republic of Venezuela**

Washington, DC • U.S.A.

**Ministry of People's Power  
for Foreign Affairs**



## ***After the Short Lived 2002 Coup*** **The People of Venezuela and the U.S. Celebrate the Retaking of Democracy**



***On the nine-year anniversary of the retaking of democracy in Venezuela, U.S. voices send messages of support to the Venezuelan people and the Bolivarian Revolution.***

On April 13, 2002, the pressure and protests of the majority of the Venezuelan people returned President Hugo Chávez to office, bringing to an end a 48-hour coup launched by sectors of the Venezuelan political opposition, including its allies in the private media and in the international community.

The coup, which began on April 11 and was supported by the administration of President George W. Bush, left 19 people dead and shattered Venezuela's democratic institutions. During the coup the National Assembly was closed, the 1999 Constitution suspended and democratic rights set aside as dictator Pedro Carmona – then the president of the Chamber of Commerce— and his allies sought to undo the dramatic political, economic and social changes led by President Chávez with the overwhelming support of the Venezuelan people.

It was that support that brought Chávez back. On April 13, hundreds of thousands of regular Venezuelans who had voted for real change and hope in 1998 took to the streets, demanding that president Chávez and the other leaders that they elected and institutions they supported be reinstated.

Despite the position of the U.S. government on the coup, the people of the U.S. rejected it in the strongest terms and in turn celebrated when the people of Venezuela took back their democracy.

Today, nine years after the retaking of democracy in the country that April 13th, many in the U.S. celebrate this date. Here are some of these other voices of the U.S. that are not usually heard in the main stream media:

"I will never forget the day President Chávez returned to office after being kidnapped by those leading the coup. I told my children that day, as we danced with joy, that this was unprecedented – as if Salvador Allende himself had miraculously returned from the dead. Chávez, with the support and the struggle of the Venezuelan people, had beat back a U.S.-supported coup – an incredible feat indeed! On this day, the 9th anniversary of this wonderful achievement, I urge the Venezuelan people to continue to defend their country and their revolution, and to continue to be a voice for the poor of this world and a voice against imperialist aggression." —Daniel Kovalik, human rights and labor attorney, United States.

"After decades of living under a Kleptocracy that called itself a Democracy, the majority of Venezuelans can appreciate the changed meaning of democracy. Since the onset of the Bolivarian revolutionary government the kleptocrats and their supporters complain. The very people who supported the bloody Caracazo and the hideously bad distribution of wealth in the country today have morphed into the protectors of democratic institutions — and pigs have learned to fly." —Saul Landau, journalist, filmmaker and professor.

"In reversing the 2002 coup, the people of Venezuela set a crucial precedent. It started with women, the first to come onto the streets when President Chávez was removed from power. They showed that people risking their lives together can defeat military coups. The people of Haiti, another Caribbean country, have also fought for and won the return of their leader, President Aristide, after seven long years in forced exile. Since our first visit in 2002, we have been broadcasting the importance of the Venezuelan revolution and what it is accomplishing for all of us. Venceremos. Viva la revolucion!." —Margaret Prescod and Phoebe Jones, Global Women's Strike.

"On this ninth anniversary of the retaking of revolutionary democracy in Venezuela, congratulations to the Venezuelan people! You are showing the world what it means to have unshakable faith that the masses can understand their condition and have the ability solve their own problems. Change cannot come through 'appealing' to the powers that be but must instead come from a profound and prerequisite transformation on the ground. If there were only one thing to learn from the people's revolution in Venezuela it is that genuine reforms are only such when they are consciously taken as intermediate steps toward revolutionary change. Venceremos!" —Netfa Freeman, Pan-Africanist and internationalist organizer in the U.S.

"In a moment when many thought that all was lost, masses of people in Venezuela stood up and refused to let the clock of history be set backwards. The hypocrisy of all those who use the rhetoric of democracy but are prepared to use covert action and destabilization in order to thwart the will of a popular democratic mass movement was exposed in the course of a few days. Yet, even with the successful defeat of the coup people, the struggle to expand mass, democratic rule and to narrow the space for the elite and their imperial allies continues. Nevertheless, the people of Venezuela stood then, as they do now, as a shining example of determination to be free." — Bill Fletcher, Jr., BlackCommentator.com

"Thanks to the retaking of democracy on April 13, the peaceful and democratic process of change could continue in Venezuela. President Chávez was overwhelmingly re-elected in 2006, and both support for and participation in the country's democratic system is higher than ever (66% in the last legislative election). Poverty and inequality have been dramatically reduced as social spending has increased; and regional integration has moved forward.

Photo, Archive: Néstor Sánchez Cordero  
Press Office – Venezuelan Embassy to the U.S. / April 13, 2011.

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**Luego de breve Golpe de abril de 2002  
Pueblo venezolano y estadounidense celebran retoma de hilo constitucional**

A nueve años de la recuperación de la democracia por el pueblo venezolano, después del golpe de Estado de abril de 2002, voces estadounidenses envían mensajes de apoyo al pueblo venezolano y la Revolución Bolivariana. El 13 de abril de 2002, las presiones y protestas de la mayoría del pueblo venezolano - con el apoyo de la Fuerza Armada - retomaron al poder al presidente constitucional de Venezuela, Hugo Chávez Frías, lo que puso fin a un golpe de Estado de 48 horas, perpetrado por sectores de la oposición política venezolana, incluyendo sus aliados en los medios privados y en la comunidad internacional.

El golpe, iniciado el 11 de abril, fue apoyado por el gobierno de George W. Bush, dejó un saldo de 19 personas asesinadas y destruyó las instituciones democráticas del país. Durante esta acción inconstitucional, la Asamblea Nacional y la Constitución de 1999 fueron abolidas y los derechos democráticos dejados a un lado, mientras el dictador Pedro Carmona Estanga -entonces presidente de la Federación de Cámaras y Asociaciones de Comercio y Producción de Venezuela (Fedecamaras)- y sus aliados intentaban deshacer los drásticos cambios políticos, económicos y sociales que empezaban a desarrollarse en el país, liderados por el presidente Chávez y con el apoyo mayoritario del pueblo venezolano.

Fue ese apoyo el que devolvió a Chávez al poder. El 13 de abril de 2002, cientos de miles de venezolanos de a pie, quienes votaron por cambios reales y esperanzas para el país en 1998, tomaron las calles exigiendo que el presidente Chávez, los líderes que eligieron y las instituciones que apoyaron fueran restituidos. A pesar de la posición del gobierno de Estados Unidos frente al golpe, el pueblo estadounidense también lo rechazó rotundamente y celebró cuando el pueblo venezolano recuperó su democracia.

Hoy a nueve años de la recuperación de la democracia en el país aquel 13 de abril, muchos en Estados Unidos celebran esta fecha. A continuación, algunos de los mensajes que envían al pueblo venezolano estas voces del pueblo de Estados Unidos que no se escuchan usualmente en los medios corporativos:

"Nunca olvidaré el día que el presidente Chávez regresó a la presidencia después de haber sido secuestrado por quienes lideraron el golpe. Le dije a mis hijos, mientras bailábamos con alegría, que no existían precedentes, como si Salvador Allende, él mismo, hubiese milagrosamente regresado de la muerte. Chávez, con el apoyo y la lucha del pueblo venezolano, le había ganado a un golpe apoyado por Estados Unidos ¡Una verdadera hazaña! Este día, el noveno aniversario de este logro maravilloso, insto al pueblo venezolano a que continúe defendiendo su país y su revolución, y que continúe siendo una voz para los pobres de este mundo y contra las agresiones imperialistas". Daniel Kovalik, abogado de derechos humanos y sindicatos, Estados Unidos.

"Después de décadas viviendo bajo una cleptocracia que se llamaba así misma democracia, la mayoría de los venezolanos pueden apreciar hoy el verdadero significado de la democracia. Desde los inicios del Gobierno Bolivariano los cleptócratas y sus seguidores se han quejado. Así, la misma gente que apoyó la masacre de El Caracazo y la terrorífica distribución de la riqueza en el país entonces, hoy aseguran ser los protectores de las instituciones democráticas - ¡eso será verdad, cuando los cochinos aprendan a volar!" Saúl Landau, periodista, director cinematográfico y profesor, Estados Unidos.

"Al revertir el golpe de 2002, el pueblo venezolano sentó un precedente crucial. Comenzó con las mujeres, las primeras en salir a las calles, cuando el presidente Chávez fue removido del poder. Ellas demostraron que si la gente arriesga su vida unida puede vencer golpes militares. El pueblo de Haití, otro país en el Caribe, también ha peleado y finalmente logrado que regrese su líder, el presidente Aristide, después de siete años de un largo exilio. Desde nuestra primera visita en 2002, hemos difundido la importancia de la revolución venezolana y sus logros para todos nosotros. ¡Venceremos! ¡Viva la revolución!" Margaret Prescod and Phoebe Jones, de la organización estadounidense Global Women's Strike.

- "En este noveno aniversario de la recuperación de la democracia revolucionaria en Venezuela, ¡felicitaciones al pueblo venezolano! Ustedes le están demostrando al mundo lo que significa tener una fe inquebrantable en que el pueblo puede entender su condición y tener la posibilidad de resolver sus propios problemas. El cambio no puede venir apelando a los que están en el poder, sino más bien mediante una profunda y necesaria transformación de la base. Si sólo hubiese un aspecto que aprender de la revolución del pueblo en Venezuela es que las reformas genuinas sólo son tales cuando son conscientemente tomadas como pasos intermedios para el cambio revolucionario. ¡Venceremos!- Netfa Freeman, Pan-africanista y activista internacional en Estados Unidos.

- "En un momento cuando pensábamos que ya todo estaba perdido, el pueblo de Venezuela se levantó y se rehusó que el reloj de la historia retrocediera. La hipocresía de todos aquellos que utilizan la retórica de la democracia pero están listos para usar acciones encubiertas y la desestabilización para torcer la voluntad de un movimiento masivo popular y democrático fue expuesta en unos pocos días. Sin embargo, incluso después de vencer exitosamente a los organizadores del golpe, la batalla por expandir el gobierno democrático del pueblo y reducir el espacio de la élite y sus aliados imperiales continúa. Pero el pueblo de Venezuela se levantó entonces, como lo hace ahora, siendo un ejemplo iluminador de la determinación de ser libre". Bill Fletcher, Jr., escritor BlackCommentator.com

Gracias a la recuperación de la democracia el 13 de abril de 2002, el proceso de cambios pacíficos y democráticos pudo continuar en Venezuela. El presidente Chávez fue reelecto por una mayoría abrumadora en 2006 y tanto el apoyo como la participación en sistema democrático del país es más alto que nunca (66% de participación electoral en la última elección legislativa). Además, la pobreza y la desigualdad han disminuido drásticamente, mientras que la inversión social se ha incrementado considerablemente y la integración regional sigue avanzando.

Foto archivo: Néstor Sánchez Cordero

Prensa - Embajada venezolana en EE UU / 13 de abril de 2011

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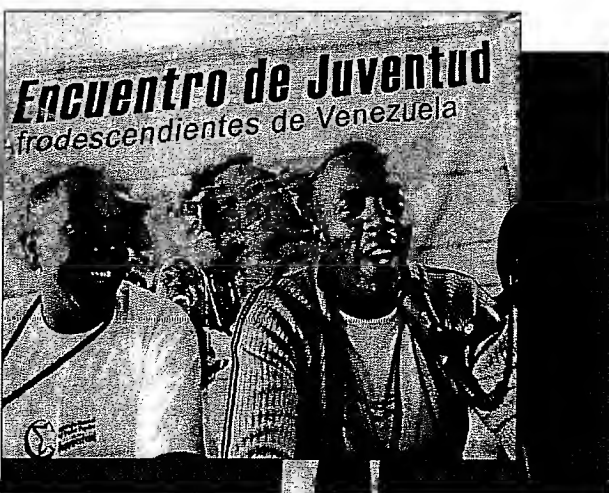
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Dear friends and colleagues,

I hope you will join us this coming Wednesday, May 4 in celebration of Africa Month in Venezuela, and welcome Afro-Venezuelan Deputy Modesto Ruiz Espinoza to Washington!

Please pass on to all those you think would be interested. Please find the pdf flyer also attached for your use.

Best, Olivia



# Afro-Venezuelans and the Struggle for Equality in Venezuela

Featuring  
Congressman Modesto Ruiz

Wednesday, May 4, 6:30-8:30 p.m.  
Bolivarian Hall, 2443 Massachusetts Ave, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20007

In Venezuela, the month of May is designated as Africa Month, while the national day of Afro-Venezuelan identity, which was created by the National Assembly in 2005, is celebrated on May 10. In honor of these important celebrations, we are pleased to invite you to a special discussion with Venezuelan Congressman Modesto Ruiz Espinoza, President of

the Subcommittee on Legislation, Participation, Warranties, Duties and Rights of African Descendants in the National Assembly of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Modesto Ruiz has been a deputy from the state of Miranda, which encompasses the historically Afro-Venezuelan region of the country known as Barlovento, since 2006. In 2009 he became the President of the Subcommittee on Legislation, Participation, Warranties, Duties and Rights of African descendants. In that capacity, he was recently responsible for the drafting of a national law against racial discrimination and intolerance that is expected to be passed this May. He has also been involved in the move to include recognition of Afro-Venezuelans as a distinct group for the purposes of the 2011 Census in Venezuela and has been a member of the Network of Afro-Venezuelan Organizations since 2007.

Deputy Ruiz will discuss the advancements as well as the problems in the struggle for racial justice and social inclusion in Venezuela.



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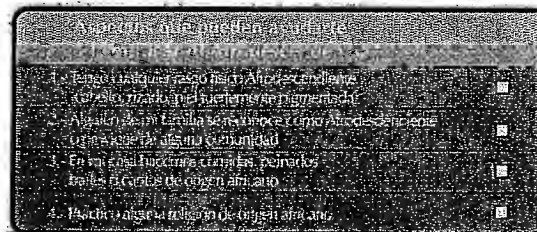
**Ministry of People's Power  
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## AFRO-VENEZUELAN AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST RACISM

Venezuela is making unprecedented progress in historical legacy of racism and the national importance of its heritage, through several initiatives, such as the following:

- Recognition of intercultural in the 1999 Constitution
- Social missions addressing and inequality
- The creation of the Presidential Commission for Prevention and Elimination Forms of Racial Discrimination in 2005
- New Education Law in 2009
- The incorporation of Afro-Venezuelan-specific in the 2011 Census
- The official celebration of the Africa and Day of Afro-Venezuelans in May
- The Establishment of the Minister for African Affairs
- The upcoming new law against racism and discrimination

**SOY  
AFRO  
DESCEN  
DIENTE**  
...y así como te reconoces



**"Si cumples con algunas de estas características  
piensa si te reconoces afrodescendiente"**

combating the  
recognizing  
African  
governmental

education

poverty

the  
of all

approved

questions

Month of

Vice-

### THE LEGACY OF SLAVERY

An estimated 100,000 enslaved Africans were brought to Venezuela between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>1</sup> Most were sold to the central coastal states, which drove an agricultural economy based in coffee and cacao.



The abolition of slavery occurred in 1854, but freedom did not bring equality. Racism continued to flourish in Venezuela throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and African heritage was denied through an emphasis on racial mixing. The *mestizo*, born of European, Indigenous, and African blood, became a cornerstone of national identity. In this scheme, Blackness was devalued to such an extent that state policies sought to "whiten" the population through European immigration.<sup>ii</sup> For example, the Immigration Law of 1912 established that non-European individuals as well as Jews could not be accepted as immigrants in the country. This law was slightly modified in 1938 to allow the acceptance of a few members of these groups, but only with special permission from the Foreign Ministry. Only in 1966 did the government de-emphasize the issue of the immigrants' race in this law.<sup>iii</sup>

Shortly thereafter, under the 1952-1958 dictatorship of Marcos Perez Jimenez, the Plan of the Nation included an official plan for "whitening" the population. As he points out in his own words, "Within the big ideas of the national ideal it has been said, with full knowledge, that it is necessary to improve the physical environment and ethnic component. We have a number of physical and hereditary defects that must be corrected [...] Therefore, among the questions of the *New National Ideal*, the first necessity is to mix our race with European peoples, [...] looking for a selective immigration, in simpler words, we want the very best we can find."

Venezuela, like many other Latin American countries, used the idea of the *mestizo* to uphold a myth of racial democracy that denied the fact that rampant discrimination on the basis of skin color and African identity took place.<sup>iv</sup>

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### AFRO-VENEZUELAN TODAY

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Historically, poor and rural citizens have lacked access to health care and education in Venezuela. Additionally, the areas with the largest Afro-Venezuelan populations have been traditionally the ones facing the highest levels of poverty.

**Hugo Chávez is the first president in Venezuela's history to claim and honor his indigenous and African ancestry.** In an interview with Amy Goodman in 2005, President Chávez said, "Hate against me has a lot to do with racism. Because of my big mouth, because of my curly hair. And I'm so proud to have this mouth and this hair, because it's African."<sup>v</sup>

Since the first election of President Chávez in 1998, reforms have been gradually instituted to address the problems faced by the Afro-Venezuelan community and to extend to them important social, political, and economic rights.<sup>vi</sup> These reforms included the recognition of intercultural education in the 1999 Constitution, a diversity of social programs and new laws. For example, **in 2005 President Chávez approved Presidential Decree No. 3645 that established the Presidential Commission for the Prevention and Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination in the Venezuelan Educational System.**<sup>vii</sup>

That same year the Venezuelan National Assembly officially designated May 10 as Afro-Venezuelan Day (Día de la afrovenezolanidad). Other advances also include the establishment of the Vice-Ministry for African Affairs. Additionally, this coming May the approval of a national law against racial discrimination and intolerance by the National Assembly is expected.

**Education:** Massive literacy campaigns and new educational institutions have allowed more than 1.5 million adults to learn to read and write, or to return to school. Due to subsidized education programs for elementary, high school, and college-aged students, Afro-Venezuelans are partaking in education at unprecedented rates. Once a privilege enjoyed by only a few,

education is now considered a human right. **Additionally, in August 2009 a new Organic Law of Education was approved addressing the rights of Afro-descendants** in five of its articles, and opening the door to formulating new regulations dealing with specific issues concerning the Afro-descendant community. "The law requires that educational institutions teach the history of African descendants and prohibits the media from conveying messages of discrimination against Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendants."<sup>viii</sup>

**Health Care:** With the 1999 Constitution, **Venezuela became the second Latin American country after Cuba to guarantee all citizens the right to basic healthcare.** To meet this goal, a partnership was initiated with the government of Cuba in 2003, which provided 20,000 medical professionals to treat previously underserved Venezuelans. In the eight years since the Mision Barrio Adentro ("Inside the Neighborhood Mission") was created, thousands of community health clinics have been established throughout the country that **have directly benefited Afro-Venezuelans, which had been hit harder by the insufficient public health services in the country.** In that time, 302,171 lives have been saved and 7,382 babies delivered in the 6,712 facilities used for the social program.

**Political Participation:** Since 2003, millions of Afro-Venezuelans have been issued national ID cards guaranteeing them the citizenship rights they previously lacked. Article 56 of the 1999 Constitution guarantees all persons the right to free registration with the Civil Registry Office, a measure which **has allowed electoral participation among Afro-Venezuelans to grow tremendously.** Afro-Venezuelans have exercised their right to vote as well as to run for political office in unprecedented numbers over the course of the 16 elections that have taken place in Venezuela since 1998.

**In the Chávez administration, Afro-Venezuelans occupy important posts as legislators, ambassadors, and assemblymen.** Additionally, the Chávez administration was the first in Venezuelan history to include a black Venezuelan – **Aristobulo Isturiz, now a vice-president of the National Assembly** – in the Executive Cabinet.

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## THE 2011 CENSUS

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For the first time ever, Venezuela's 2011 Census will include a question that allows individuals to identify themselves as being Afro-descendent. This move came at the behest of social organizations fighting for the explicit recognition of the Afro-descendent population in Venezuela. It will better allow Venezuela to recognize its diversity and respond accordingly to the specific needs of different groups. **The network of Afro-Venezuelan Organizations estimates that there are more than seven million Venezuelans of African descent.**<sup>ix</sup>

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## RELATIONS WITH AFRICA/CARIBBEAN

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Venezuela has prioritized its relations with Africa by opening 18 new embassies in countries including Mali, Morocco, Congo, Angola, and many more. The diplomatic initiative has been accompanied by cooperative energy agreements as well as programs in health and education.<sup>x</sup>

In the Caribbean, Venezuela is helping ease the energy burden faced by many countries through a plan called PetroCaribe, which provides countries with oil at market prices made affordable through beneficial financing terms. This aid provides member countries with energy and stimulates national and regional economic and social development. Currently, all but 3 countries in the Caribbean belong to PetroCaribe.

Additionally, Venezuela has provided consistent aid and support to the people of Haiti in the wake of the devastating January 2010 earthquake that struck the country. Over the course of the year since the earthquake, Venezuela sent 8,139 tons of food, medicines and other forms of humanitarian assistance. Venezuela has also provided vital financial assistance. Through the Bolivarian Alliance of the People of Our Americas (ALBA), Venezuela established a \$100 million Humanitarian Fund. Additionally, Venezuela fully forgave Haiti's \$395 million debt to PetroCaribe. In making the announcement in late January 2010, President Hugo Chávez stated, "Haiti has no debt with Venezuela – on the contrary, it is Venezuela that has a historic debt with Haiti." In a March 2010 international conference on Haiti, Venezuela announced that its assistance to Haiti from 2010-2016 would total \$2.4 billion.

Venezuelan personnel have also constructed and operate five camps for internally displaced people in Jacmel, Petit Goave, Grand Goave, and Leogane. The camps have served 5,431 families, amounting to over 25,000 Haitians. In a March 2010 letter to the president of the CITGO Petroleum Corporation, which is owned by Venezuela's state oil company, the president of the TransAfrica Forum, a human rights organization that works in Haiti, noted that Venezuelan camps "are the only camps that meet the UN standards for living conditions of IDPs [internally displaced people]."<sup>xi</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Jesús María Herrera Salas, "Ethnicity and Revolution: The Political Economy of Racism in Venezuela," *Latin American Perspectives* 32:2, March 2005.

<sup>ii</sup> "Chucho Garcia Interview: Race and Racial Divides in Venezuela," By Gregory Wilpert, *Venezuelanalysis*, Jan. 21, 2004. <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/articulos.php?artno=1091>

<sup>iii</sup> Teun Van Dijk, *Racismo y Discurso en América Latina*. Gedisa. P.377.

<sup>iv</sup> *Café con Leche: Race, Class, and the National Image in Venezuela*, Winthrop R. Wright (University of Texas Press, 1993).

<sup>v</sup> "Venezuela's President Chavez Offers Cheap Oil to the Poor...of the United States", *Democracy Now*, September 20, 2005. [http://www.democracynow.org/2005/9/20/venezuelas\\_president\\_chavez\\_offers\\_cheap\\_oil](http://www.democracynow.org/2005/9/20/venezuelas_president_chavez_offers_cheap_oil)

<sup>vi</sup> "The Political Status of Afro-Venezuelans in the Bolivarian Revolution: A Democratic Measure for Venezuela and a Hemispheric Imperative," by James Early and Jesus "Chucho" Garcia, Olivia Burlingame Goumbri, ed., *The Venezuela Reader: The Building of a People's Democracy* (EPICA, 2005).

<sup>vii</sup> "Afrodescendants and Intercultural Education: Lessons from Venezuela", *Transafrica Forum*, 2010.

<http://www.transafricaforum.org/policy-overview/where-we-work/afro-des-and-intcult-ed-lessons-venezuela>

<sup>viii</sup> "Afrovenezuelans and educational access", *Transafrica Forum*, 2009. [http://www.transafricaforum.org/files/Afro-Venezuelans%20and%20Educational%20Access\\_IUB%20\\_Final.pdf](http://www.transafricaforum.org/files/Afro-Venezuelans%20and%20Educational%20Access_IUB%20_Final.pdf)

<sup>ix</sup> "Completing the Chávez revolution", July 1, 2005. <http://www.seeingblack.com/2005/x070105/garcia.shtml>

<sup>x</sup> "Africa-Venezuela: Weaving New Alliances With Cultural Threads," By Humberto Márquez, *Inter Press Service*, Oct. 28, 2005. <http://ipsnews.net/africa/nota.asp?idnews=30807>

<sup>xi</sup> "A Year After Haiti Earthquake, Venezuela Remains Committed to Reconstruction," Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. <http://vcnczuela-us.org/2011/01/13/a-year-after-haiti-earthquake-venezuela-remains-committed-to-reconstruction/#morc-14984>